1: Childs M-5 (1924-1940) 1949 FP13 Mbundu FP13

621 476 common meal was formerly a great bond of village unity. Mutual help within the village and the family group is practised on many occasions. There are a number of folk-tales designed to show the evil consequences of refusing to lend, whether beer-pots or more valued assistance. Many proverbs enjoin the necessity of prompt and effectual mutual helpfulness and co-operation, as e.g.

U o popela ukuavo ongandu ha lula.

[538] (He who saves another (from) a crocodile does not undress.)

476 The mechanism of co-operation, the round of daily life in village and field, together with the cycles of food and of work, are properly subjects of further study. Here the purpose is to show the definitely family nature of the village and of its life. To the [181] casual observer the Ovimbundu appear as severe individualists. Indeed, they are individualistic to a degree, but they have worked out mechanisms of mutual helpfulness and co-operation which functioned both on political lines under the aegis of the king and within the kinship units.

Social Life of the Village

517 521 562 The two foci of the village life are the Men's Club and the Dancing Floor. Even though no *onjango* may have been built, the Men's Club will find a place in which to carry on, at least when there may be fine weather. Leisure may be limited, but time for conversation will be found. Europeans often express wonder at the amount of conversation which goes on between Africans, for they cannot understand what people of apparently such limited opportunities and with what seems like so narrow an outlook may have to discuss at such great length. As for the Ovimbundu, there is nothing which is a greater hardship than lack of opportunity for conversation with their fellows. Under primitive conditions this is more especially true of the men, who, in their villages, are always surrounded by members of their own family group. Owing to their peculiar position in the village and their household pre-occupations, the women's social propensities may find less outlet in these public gatherings. When the villagers gather on the dancing floor and the gourds of beer go round, they always separate according to sex. Whether the occasion be formal or informal, I have seen the discussion carried to great lengths, with the pipe passed between the men, while the women sat silently by,

1: Childs M-5 (1924-1940) 1949 FP 13 Mbundu FP 13

expeditions. Many blood-brotherhoods were doubtless undertaken purely from motives of friendship.[1] The *vakuacisoko* is a friendly institution. The Ovimbundu are a friendly people.

Identification is a strikingly important feature of Umbundu social adjustments and of the whole learning process. Children overtly identify themselves with older siblings, with parents, with other older relatives both living and dead, with friends of their parents, with the village headman, or even the king.[2] This perhaps is the process involved in that which the Ovimbundu name reincarnation. It is largely through identification that character appears to run in families. This is why boys are so keen to learn the professions of their fathers or their mother's brothers. Identification with their seniors in social position and economic activity more closely cements the unity of the child–adult sphere and gives the children yet another urge to enter into adult life and assume complete responsibility as quickly as possible.

'Inferiority Conflict' has probably been present in Umbundu life for a long time, perhaps since the rubber trade (1874), perhaps even longer. When a people's activity is keyed to so high a pitch there will be some individuals who find themselves inadequate. There are a number of proverbs which ridicule the stay-at-homes or those 'too lazy' to undertake the exceedingly arduous trading expeditions. European domination has set new paces and created new frustrations, with one result, that 'inferiority conflicts' are probably on the increase. Many individual instances could be cited. A particularly striking one of my observation is of a man whose suffering from epileptic seizures had induced attitudes of inferiority. The conflict was exacerbated by his selection as a hospital assistant, in which position the responsibility required was plainly beyond his ability.[3] Individuals suffering from any physical disability find life difficult among such an aggressive people.

If the disability is great the handicapped individual generally finds the adjustment beyond his powers. I have observed a number of severely crippled individuals brought up in traditional kinship groups, and all of them were suffering from overt inferiority conflicts. All of these individuals had adopted compensatory

[1] Although the rite seems to have connotations of sorcery.

[2] Among the Tallensi, according to Fortes, identification is only with older siblings, with parents, and with 'the clan' (op. cit., pp. 46 ff.).

[3] Epilepsy (*ocinonya*) is considered by the Ovimbundu as a visitation of the spirits and is much feared.

1: Childs M-S (1924-1940) 1949 FP13 Mbundu FP13

tenderness towards and consideration for those weaker than oneself, for women, for children, and for the aged may be seen among Ovimbundu who are quite untouched by Christianity or Christian teachings in any form. This was often noticed and remarked upon by the early missionaries.[1] Umbundu treatment of children, the habitually respectful form of address used in speaking to them, and respect for their personalities[2] is further evidence of this tender side of Umbundu character, as is also their banning of angry behaviour from the relations of the home.[3]

Such a combination of aggressive, dignified, and tender behaviour makes for character worthy of admiration. It is a heritage worth conserving and passing on to succeeding generations.

Description and analysis now hands the problem to education. I cannot find a more fitting close for this chapter than the following statement of the problem:

> From the obscurities that for us still hang about African childhood, the fact emerges that Africans do educate their children. It is a genuine education. . . . What the African sets out to do, namely, to prepare the new generation to take its place in the community and carry on the tribal tradition, he accomplishes with a very considerable measure of success. . . . What Mr. Bryant has said of the Zulus may be said of some other African tribes: 'Through the ages, this admirable system of forming character and imparting knowledge continued, until at length was evolved a Zulu race noble of heart, dignified of bearing, refined of manners, and learned in natural science—qualities, alas! rapidly dying out before the destructive and demoralizing advance of European civilization!' The concluding sentence applies to many a tribe. No small part of the demoralization is caused by the disturbance of family life through the prolonged absence of the senior males at work on European mines and plantations and through the flocking of boys to European towns; it is in the family life, as we have seen, that the most

[1] 'We saw a party crossing the Kulili (*Kalili*) River on a bridge of the frailest construction. The young men went first, deposited their loads on the bank, and returned for the loads of the old men, who carefully crept over unburdened. Then some of the young men recrossed and took their baskets from the women, and their babies as well. Last of all, two strong youths assisted the women themselves to cross. Nothing could be more tenderly considerate.

'Whatever customs may prevail in other parts of Africa, here it is entirely false to say that women are ill-treated. No one of either sex does any great amount of work, but such as it is is fairly divided. . . . They are certainly as well-treated as the wives of the poorer classes at home, and do infinitely less drudgery.' From a letter of Dr. Nichols in the *Missionary Herald* for 1883, p. 229.

[2] See *supra*, p. 120 f.

[3] See *supra*, p. 124 f.

L: Childs M-S (1924-1940) 1940 FP 13 Mbundu FP 13

for tribute and other exactions of King Konya Cilemo, successor to the stool of Viye, decided to leave his place at Belmonte (Viye) for Benguela,[1] where he remained for ten years. A year later Guilherme Gonçalves left to his sons his flourishing settlement near Kamundongo (Viye), and sailed for Lisbon, intending to stay indefinitely.[2] These two men were the leading traders established in the Highland, but little idea had they that the small trickle of rubber exports begun in 1869 would so soon inaugurate a new era in Central African trade. It was only in 1882 that rubber took even second place in the exports (after bees-wax),[3] but already in 1872[4] its importance was becoming evident, and by 1877 individual Ovimbundu of Viye had already turned over considerable fortunes in the trade.[5] Bastos seems to be correct in taking 1874 as the beginning of this new era in the trade of the region.[6] For the Ovimbundu, the preceding decades, indeed the preceding century or even centuries, had been a period of preparation for the trade which was now beginning. For them the rubber trade, from 1874 until its close in 1916, was the classical period of commercial activity.

The time of preparation had necessarily developed in the Ovimbundu the intellectual acumen, venturesomeness, a technique of co-operation both within their own social groupings and with outsiders, a knowledge of people, places, and things of their Central African world, together with the other qualities which enabled them to carry on their far-flung trading activities. These qualities merit a fuller description (q.v. *infra*, p. 206 f.). During this earlier period, since many of their travels were naturally exploratory, the Ovimbundu probably travelled more widely than during the time of the rubber trade. There were hardly any territories within the bounds of the Congo River, the Lakes, and the Kalahari Desert which they had not penetrated.[7] Some Ovimbundu went even farther afield as employees of European traders or on their own account. A ready example is Domingos Cakahanga and his companions who, in the employ of Silva Porto during the years

[1] *Boletim Soc. Geog. Lisboa*, 5a Ser., p. 20.
[2] See Cameron, op. cit., p. 400.
[3] *Benguella*, op. cit., 1887, pp. 24 ff.
[4] *Benguella*, op. cit., 1892, p. 29.
[5] Serpa Pinto, op. cit., p. 161 f.
[6] Bastos, op. cit., p. 24.
[7] Serpa Pinto, op. cit., p. 164; L. Magyar, op. cit., pp. 298, 299. The best proof, however, is the fact of the geographical and tribal names found in the Umbundu language.

174 principal focus of the cattle-keeping areas. The king's death is not announced by the Ovimbundu. There is a special hut for burial, and part of the head is later removed for decoration and separate interment. This part of the royal corpse is subsequently brought out for worship and supplication. The Ovimbundu never admit the death of a king until a successor has been chosen. The king's body is buried in oxhide, but the head is severed by suspending the corpse with a rope round the neck, then twisting the body. The head is sewn in oxhide and kept in a box. In time of drought or before a journey a chief or medicine-man visits the head to make a sacrifice and ask for help. Oxen are killed at funeral feasts of the wealthy and the horns are mounted over the grave. Mourners for the king wear strips of oxhide round their wrists.

There can be no doubt that the Ovimbundu received the above traits, also their knowledge and use of the sacred fire, from the cattle-keeping area. The use of sacred fire has been shown to be a primary trait associated with the keeping of cattle. Reference to field work among the Ovimbundu indicates that the usages connected with sacred fire agree in detail with those of the pastoral area. The Ovimbundu keep the sacred fire burning in the burial place of kings; for instance at Ngalangi, as described. The Ovimbundu create new fire by twirling when a new village site is opened, and the fire is distributed from the chief's home. Lustration after an epidemic of sickness is always ceremonially carried out by creation of new fire on which the blood of sacrificed animals is sprinkled. Therefore, in general outline and considerable detail the factors associated with cattle-keeping among the Ovimbundu are those of the pastoral areas of east, south, and southwest Africa.

In summarizing we may say that contacts of the Ovimbundu with southwest Africa have arisen from occupation of contiguous territory, along with trading and raiding. The acquisitions made by the Ovimbundu from pastoral tribes include several artifacts such as sandals, the assagai, and the throwing club. More important than the diffusion of these objects into Umbundu culture has been the reception of the cattle themselves, along with the social values, usages, and religious beliefs which are the usual concomitants of the African pastoral culture.

174 191 A study of the culture contacts of the Ovimbundu conclusively shows that they are not an isolated people whose artifacts, religious beliefs, and social life stand out distinctively from the culture patterns around them. On the contrary the Ovimbundu have,

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through trade and warfare, been an absorbent people, reaching out in all directions and assimilating all cultural traits which were of service. 174 181

Up to this point, only the immediate culture contacts of the Ovimbundu have been considered. Yet it is evident that some of the cultural traits which have been discussed are widely diffused in Africa. Consequently, some further inquiry is needed if the tribal life of the Ovimbundu is to be considered against a broad ethnological background of African culture.

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could be observed. Eventually I decided to work in the Bimbe area, in the extreme north-western corner of Umbundu country. The census[10] indicated that Bimbe had a smaller white population than any comparable area of Umbundu country, and people who knew it considered that it was one of the areas most likely to retain a relatively conservative social life.

In Bimbe I settled in the village of Epalanga in the chiefdom of Gumba. The advantage of Gumba lay in the conservatism for which its people were noted in other chiefdoms; its disadvantage lay in its proximity to the northern boundary of Umbundu speech and culture, which led me to collect some items of ethnographic information not typical of Umbundu country.[11] On the whole, I am satisfied that the people of Gumba were in the past as in the present Ovimbundu in both speech and way of life.[12]

Many of my discoveries were at first negative ones. I could not find any evidence that there was a double system of kinship groups actually in existence; the villages were not composed of agnatic kin; the chief seemed lacking in power. Nor was it easy to obtain detailed information about the past even from old men. There is little interest nowadays in history, nor are the old social institutions regarded, even by those who once participated in them, as being necessarily better than those of the present day. The reason for this attitude seems to lie in Umbundu social psychology with its readiness to accept European authority and values. Interesting as the motivations behind this attitude are, this 'cultural amnesia' caused me much disappointment. I found it much easier to get texts on the caravan trade, and on ceremonial practices and proverbs, than on the political and kinship systems. The inadequacies of the information I received on the political system may be explained by the fact that Gumba is on the fringe of the area tributary to the old kingdom of

[10] Of 1950.

[11] The payment of fines by a man to his dead wife's kin had been formerly practised in Gumba, and still is further north. It does not seem to have been known in living memory elsewhere in Umbundu country.

[12] The northern limit of Umbundu speech is now somewhere to the north of the administrative post of Cela. As there has not been substantial migration from the south, it is reasonable to assume that it is many years since the Gumba–Cela boundary was also the language boundary.

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rather than any political alliance or opposition, which related the Ovimbundu as a whole to the Portuguese and the other tribes. Informants who remember 'the time of the rubber' talk about it with much more interest and much more detail than about any other aspect of the past, and it is far easier to make an ordered picture out of the narratives of the caravan journeys than to fill in the gaps in the descriptions of the political and kinship systems provided by Childs and Hastings.[57]

Politically the Ovimbundu were divided, as has been said, into several kingdoms. Bailundo, the largest of the kingdoms was divided, according to Childs into about 200 sub-chiefdoms. As it had about half a million inhabitants this would give an average population of about 2,500. While the kingdoms seem to have been more or less stable in number and boundaries from the end of the eighteenth century, the number of sub-chiefdoms seems to have increased. Thus an official Portuguese estimate made in 1799 gives Bailundo as having only 82 sub-chiefdoms, and Galangue, where Childs counted 112 sub-chiefdoms, as having 778. The sub-chiefdom paid tribute to the king, sent men for his armies, and recognized his court as the supreme arbitrator. Some sub-chiefdoms were held by ministers or relatives of the king.[58]

It is, however, not easy on the sparse detail available to decide how much autonomy the sub-chiefdoms really had. Gumba, the area where I worked, was a sub-chiefdom of the Bailundo kingdom, albeit on the north-western frontier, neighbouring Cassongue and Cela, where the people did not call themselves Va-Mbailundu, though their rulers acknowledged the suzerainty of the king of Bailundo. Old men told me of raids from Bailundo for slaves, but I cannot say if this was the result of the period of disorder mentioned, or whether sub-chiefdoms on the border of a kingdom gave only nominal submission and received only nominal protection. In the area where I worked,

[57] This is not intended as a personal reflection on Dr. Childs and the late Dr. Hastings, both of whom deserve the highest praise for their work and for their obvious devotion to the Ovimbundu. Hastings devoted far more space to the magico-religious field than to the kinship system. Likewise Childs's description of kinship is much shorter, much less detailed, and much less satisfactory than his account of childhood and adolescence, or the really outstanding historical chapter.

[58] Magyar, pp. 385–91; Childs, pp. 23–24.

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meet other Angolan Protestants through such occasions as the Congress of Evangelical Youth, held at Malange in 1955.

While the Catholic missions are not tied to the Ovimbundu in the same way as the Protestants the number of their adherents falls sharply when the Umbundu boundary is reached. Responsiveness to missionary activity is a mark of the Ovimbundu today just as was participation in the caravan trade. Indeed, the main common possession of the Ovimbundu, the Umbundu language, is, as a literary vehicle and object of study, almost a missionary monopoly. Both missions produce a monthly magazine in Umbundu and Portuguese, and several books of a religious or educational nature have been published with Umbundu on one side and Portuguese on the other as legally required. The dictionaries and grammars are almost all of missionary authorship.

Acceptance of Christianity has also significance for Umbundu self-consciousness. The majority of Ovimbundu have come under missionary influence in varying degrees, and conversion to Christianity makes Ovimbundu feel closer to Europeans and superior to other African peoples. I have heard African priests claim that the Ovimbundu are the best people in Angola, largely on this ground, and at Lobito and Luanda tensions have been felt in the Protestant community between Ovimbundu and members of other tribes.[11]

The Ovimbundu live under economic, political, and religious systems introduced and controlled by Europeans. Yet trader, official, and missionary are all dependent on the Ovimbundu. The 'civilized' and the native live in symbiosis, and the two basic problems of this study are the nature of this symbiosis, and its relation to the social system of the native population themselves. To see this symbiosis in perspective it is necessary to describe what occupations and statuses Africans can hold.

The strict segregation of black and white found in South Africa is alien to Portuguese traditions. There is a lack of almost all forms of public segregation between white and non-white.[12]

[11] Personal information.

[12] In the racial discrimination that does exist the mulattoes generally count as whites. It is said to be difficult for a full African to obtain accommodation in a Luanda hotel, but the situation for mulattoes is quite different.

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unambiguous approval, though there is a certain undertone suggesting cunning in the verb *eka lungula* (to be shrewd) used about prosperous people. The old suspicion of sorcery attaching to people who were more successful farmers than their neighbours[1] seems to have disappeared. While a prosperous villager would be expected to lend money to a poorer kinsman (provided the latter was not known as a bad debtor) yet, the situation which occurs in other parts of Africa, where, as Dr. V. W. Turner notes of the Mwinilunga Ndembu, prosperous Africans 'find themselves increasingly embarrassed by the demands of their kin for presents in cash and kind'[2], would not arise among the Ovimbundu, who would regard such demands as being unjustified, even outrageous.

Wealthy Ovimbundu may spend some of their wealth on clothing and on drink. Cattle-buying has been noted as a form of capital investment and the same term may be used of small stock buying. Another way of disposing of money is by building a house of bricks with the assistance of a bricklayer. A plough may be, but rarely is, bought by two men joining together to pool their money. Generally speaking, the agricultural technology of the Ovimbundu has been little changed since 1911 except for the spread of the techniques of coffee-growing.

It has been noted earlier that the Ovimbundu play an important part in the economic life of Angola both as cultivators and labourers. In this chapter an attempt has been made to show how at the local level it is the cultivation of cash crops, rather than migration for wage labour, which incorporates villagers into the commercial economy of modern Angola. The main source of money in rural areas is the trader's store, which is also the main recipient of money, apart from the administration. While trade both between Ovimbundu and between Ovimbundu and other tribes survives on a minor scale, the social institutions associated with the rubber trade, the large caravans, the non-repayable loans within the matrilineal group, and the obligations of wealthy traders to assist their kin, have disappeared. The contemporary social structure with the

[1] Childs, pp. 106-8.

[2] V. W. Turner, op. cit., p. 135.